

# High Needs Funding Task & Finish Group – Terms of Reference

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## Context:

Nationally it is reported that the gap between high needs funding and high needs expenditure is forecast to continue to increase. Despite a high proportion of councils topping up high needs budgets from other sources such as school's block transfers or use of reserves the net effect of increasing demand for SEND services and support since 2014 has left local government with a significant and increasing deficit. For individual local authorities the average net deficit by the end of the current financial year will stand at £3.4 m<sup>i</sup>. A separate survey by the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ACDS) found that 68 out of 85 responding local authorities reported an overspend on the High Needs Block in 2016-17.

In Shropshire the High Needs Block is forecast to overspend in 2018-19 and if current demand for SEND provision continues to increase and resources remain relatively static this overspend is forecast to increase year on year.

## Purpose

To use a collaborative approach to quantify the current pressure on the high needs budget and identify solutions. The Group will review Shropshire Council's application of the High Needs Block and develop a clearer understanding of the current and future forecast pressures on the authority's funding allocation.

The Group is tasked with supporting LA officers to:

- Review the financial impact of existing national SEND policy locally.
- Identify any areas where immediate savings can be made
- Identify any changes in the way that SEND services and provision is currently delivered that will secure future savings whilst maintaining positive impact for children and young people with SEND
- Develop a medium term financial plan for the High Needs Block.

## Group Membership

- Representatives drawn from the membership of Schools Forum and Central Policy Group/Headteacher Forum from across the 0-25 age range
- Other non-Forum representatives
- Local Authority representatives from Children's Services, including SEND and finance
- Specialist inputs as and when required.

## Working Methods/Objectives

- To review of the current allocation of High Needs funding from centrally controlled Dedicated Schools Grant, analysing each area of spend and the balance of funding between the various types of provision.
- To develop and refine the models for projecting future pupil numbers to inform the allocation of funding.
- To consider current strategic SEND policy and to identify and cost alternative options for delivering provision where deemed appropriate.

- To assess the short, medium and long term risks and impact of alternative models of delivery.
- To realign budgets to reflect alternative funding models with the aim of securing the best possible outcomes for Shropshire learners.
- To draw up a medium term financial plan for the High Needs Block.
- To develop an appropriate 'placement tracker', aligned to the revised funding model, to facilitate more accurate and timely monitoring and reporting of High Needs expenditure.
- To monitor, to take into account and to be informed by, the development/implementation of national education policy through the school funding reforms insofar as they relate to SEND, alternative provision and High Needs funding.
- To circulate papers in advance of the Task & Finish Group meetings.
- To provide regular progress reports to Schools Forum and to produce a final report by the end of the Summer term 2019.
- To consult and share information with the wider community of schools including headteachers, governors, partners and stakeholders.

### Project Timetable

Activity	When	Who
Approve draft Terms of Reference for High Needs Funding Task & Finish Group as well as membership, timetable and communication with stakeholders.	17 January 2019	Schools Forum
First meeting of the re-established T&FG	February 2019	T&FG
Second meeting of T&FG	March 2019	T&FG
Progress report to Schools Forum	21 March 2019	Officers
Further meetings of T&FG	Early first and second half-terms in Summer term 2019	T&FG
Final report to Schools Forum	6 June 20169	Officers

<sup>i</sup> Have we reached a 'tipping point'? Trends in spending for children and young people with SEND in England. ISOS Partnership (December 2018)

<http://www.isospartnership.com/uploads/files/LGA%20HN%20report%20published%2012.12.18.pdf>